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Bard

THE HOUSE

The only time we're allowed to touch
is when the skin lights up. Otherwise the hands
are quiet.

Air lies on them or they lie on wood
feeling nothing. No one's home in all this huge house—
we'll never visit all the rooms of it
if we go on living as we do, from shoe to shoe.

2.

Down so many stairs. Have you been to all my rooms?
Have you wielded broom and distaff there,
cleaned and woven and made new? Have you set
irises and freesias to renew the languid air,
dragged the surly gardener with full arms
to blaze my dark apartments? *Num*
question, expecting 'no.' The house is random
still, the ornaments from every Christmas tree
are scattered through all the rooms, and the scary
devil cat from Halloween lives on in attics
you never measured. Dust, sunlight and water dripping—
these are my house, and hallways never ending.
I don't know how to get so small.

16 June 1995

POPLAR

This huge poplar
like a cottonwood but cottonless

and there's the riverpale
hint-heated, morning.
The analysis
is complete. The necessary song
(sword) (all
the old-fashioned instruments)
(to tell the truth)

clear cut, to show
the reflection
of the foothills over
there in Ulster,

a cliff to be seen
barely
a word heard.

16 June 1995, KTC

And after all
isn't it isn't
enough

when the goose
flies up with her
gander joined

into goneness?
Like a girl
in the Village

Iris call her, who
stood on the wall

away. All
the way away.

16 June 1995, KTC

Maybe it's ready to answer
if only somebody would ask.

But what do bodies know
except to go on? And that's the answer.

17 June 1995

Zwei kunsthistorische Skizzen

1.

Lazerly primping, an invalid rehearses.
It is sad to deck our dealings. Secret
Lodge of the Megaphysicists. The small
has gone to their heads.

2.

Cloud and near horizons,
lowland signs, or science—in a Haarlem church
Pieter Saenredam saw the Holy Ghost
as uncontrived and unimpeded light.
Whatever there was that Spirit knew.
With so much room the god cannot be far.

17 June 1995

Standing fully clothed before the clock
ready to listen hard to what it says.
But not yet. And the mirror had a lot
to say. The wall is the color of a wall.
The flame on the candle has the look of fire.

17 June 1995, Poughkeepsie

A HISTORY OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

What happened since I got born is
the sun got brighter and the moon
got dimmer. Used to be the moon came up
big as a Zeppelin over Marine Park
and high white wide straight light
shivered out the last traces of the day's
swelter. And the sun was kind then
like a loving friend—but not too hearty—
who'd knock on your door when you got
depressed—"had the blues" we said then.
But the moon was blue and the sky
and the white light of the blue moon
is what we've mostly lost. How did it happen?
Rude boisterous sun. Poor quiet moon,
once you could barely look at it at the full.

18 June 1995

Then he lost the silence that let him sit in front of it
while airplanes moved overhead in sounds that said
this is a straight line, this is going. And a truck
curved past the house equivalently. Geometry
is the mother of being here. What after all had he lost?

Was it something blue or something red, was it small
and lost in someone's hair, or a name like the one
that will not slip from the tip of the tongue? Mountains,
he thought of mountains, snow, granite crevices,
easy to see faces in the rock of gods and Indians.

Something to do with maple, with wind, with being cold.
If he could find the silence, it would all be waiting there.

19 June 1995

The speakable miracles wake us again.
Great heat. A lulled spot. To be in the swelter of things
as a peremptory joy. 101° in Hyde Park yesterday
at 6:20 in the evening. The numbers we have posted
close to the outer circle of the mind, to tell us why we feel.
The numbers. The lost friend. The door I would not
pull her through. How right the French are to understand
fastidious as simply wearisome. Tedious consciences!
Really inaccurate desires. Being bitter about not getting
what one did not altogether want. The speakable
is what this is about. When you drive, you drive only
where the roads go, and how they choose to carry you.
The land itself you have no business with. The language
runs through it but is not it. The rules are generous
and let us tell each other any single thing that has been told before.
And then we union them, surprise, language startled,
a road flooded, sunlight on the ruins of a town.
You'll never know the land, for all your love songs and tornadoes—
the prairie abolishes awareness as you go,
you have seen this, those clouds of dust behind your car
turbulent and feeble, covering all traces of your passage.

20 June 1995

As if the river knew something
time was telling us
the whole while,
a child instructed
was just answering—
big hand, little hand,
now time has no hands—

and what the river knows
(Twain prodding us,
Eliot insinuating,
Wolfe blathering honestly,
Pound and James looking chastely away)
is of dubious good to us,

midchannel of the Hudson
(my first ode,
the dead cattle and the rhetoric, flooded
barns, sticks
of broken hayricks,
washed out tracks
of lovers' trysts,
a blue flag at sunset

through the trees the sky
Malcha herself
naked in sumac,
a shadow, Earth's own)

what the river knows
dawn freshens, words
imitate words, Charlotte's
little alarmclock chirps,
there are birds in every sky,
a little pain here and there

and we begin again,
faltering

a train on its way to it too,
the 'common knowledge'
no one grasps. Unpermitted,
south, a barge
on the river, a river
under the barge. The lights
are legal, how we go.
Red Right Return.

21 June 1995
Summer Solstice
KTC

Are the extreme claims still being made?
The tree used to make them, and soapboilers,

vestrymen, missionaries. Some idea
got dragged to paper, and we drank.

22 June 1995

Squirrels and crows complaining — the hour's theirs,
no room for human expostulation,
a drift of sensation towards a sorry lap.
You wonder how you managed to get born,
there is so little waiting to be said.

And not because you said it all.
The living and the dead are still curious for news,
wheat-whippers and dairymen still stand around
waiting for the least glimpse of what ails you
or what brings you pleasure, the princess touch,

the Stradivari faraway whose final tone
is indistinguishable from the faint sweet ringing
you can't get out of your ears. It is your dead
mother calling you on the phone, why don't you answer?
Isn't a frank confession better than all this noisy silence?

22 June 1995

AGAINST FRACTALS

The round looks square close up.
It is the habit of our technology
to be rectilinear. Straight lines
meet straight lines forever

in our curious puritan doctrine of analysis.
Meantime a hand, a hip,
a lap, a delve, a lip, a hill
is multitudinously curvilinear,

imponderable, true. But they want corners,
zillions of ever smaller fractal gestures
till we grow exhausted and touch no more,
like Mary dazed by one more risen God.

But what happens to what is not touched?
It recedes into the abstract distances
basely geometrical. Whereas what we call God
is the mysterious asymmetry floods fact with feel.

23 June 1995

A poem is a hand laid on the small of your back.
It rests steady there.
Someone behind you, a hand pressing on the small of your back.

It might reach round and hold you
snug around the waist like a brother at your side
arming you with the power of not being alone.

Or it might slip down and caress your buttocks,
sink deeper and consult your secret places
and you still don't know whose hand this is.

The hand also might begin to rise, its vivid fingers
count slowly up the rosary of your vertebrae
pressing each one firmly, softly, tenderly, a matter

of telling you where you are in yourself
and where the hand is, how it moves on or in you,
so much depends on how you meet it,

flee it or press back against it, endure it,
answer it even with subtle movements of your skin
as it challenges the strength of your shoulders

or soft as breath brushes with its fingertips
the small hairs on the nape of your neck.
And all the while you're asking Who is this?

Until suddenly you know a better question,
what am I feeling when I feel this, what is happening
in me while this hand happens?

It presses you, urges you forward to climb or go down,
towards whatever you love or fear it pushes you firmly,

only into your own world can it compel

and out the other side, you still feel it, a hand, strong,
tender, pressing you forward to the edge, every boundary,
the cliff of things, the place in you that feels the hand.

24 June 1995

HOW TO READ

Let your heart be torn wide with your yearning. Not for people. For books that break the way into knowing, different from the way you knew before, from any way you knew, right or wrong, only the difference matters. Different knowing. Strange sentences that think your thoughts a different way. Yearn for the sudden vast open spaces, instant prairies, the spaces that big music fondles, music that takes a long time to pronounce its name. Not for people. People are too much habit. People have the habit of other people. People have the habit of wanting other people. People have the habit of wanting and getting and spending all their time getting or getting rid of other people. People have a habit of wanting you, and you have a habit of wanting them. They are not disciplined in the skill of listening, for them wanting is a kind of conversation. What to do instead: people are there for you to bring your mind to, to make things for them. Say words that startle them (as some words once startled you or you wouldn't be reading now). Make them look at pictures that won't leave them alone. People are not there to hang out with. Instead: tend your garden and bring them the fruits and the flowers, the crazy stuff you cook up in the solitudes of yearning and the green shadowy walls of understanding all day long. Trying to understand. Bring them what you can say. Bring it to them from the place, call it street or call it garden or church or the dark, bring it to them from the place when your skin feels more than any body ever felt, when the rhythm of just what you happen to see happening all round, and you in it, is

more intricate than any drummer ever noticed, and you hear it, and you have to bring it. Bring it to me, for that matter. Bring it to me because I am in the heart of them. I am the tongue of their answer, and the hand of their touch. Enough about me. I am angry with noise, bring me the silence of your actual speech, the tender crap of our feelings shared, poured out, done with at last. To have done with feelings forever, and just feel! Pour out the old milk of feelings. Listen to the quiet and hear what language says, it is always talking, it never has nothing to say, and the cows come home and the moon comes out from the unraveling cloud and night explodes in diamonding. The sky's bigger than our feelings, the sky's the best and most studious music, big as the Battery, full of ocean assaulting us. The night brings us our feelings alive at last in form, all feeling is a human form that stands before us writhing, and we know it for our own, but we stand aside from it, wily as God, smiling over at this world we are, the world that made us and that we suddenly made again. Over the tears and lust of our stresses and distresses, a little apart we stand and smile at us. And we listen, mostly we listen. We listen to the think that has been spoken, the thing that is not us, but that no one but ourselves could ever speak.

24 June 1995

